

A SURVEY OF THE SALTATORIA OF THE BRISTOL AREA AND NORTH SOMERSET

By J. F. BURTON, F.R.E.S., F.Z.S.*

The main purpose of this paper is to provide a basis for future, more detailed, studies of the status and distribution of the Saltatoria (bush-crickets, crickets, grasshoppers and ground-hoppers) of the region comprising the vice-county of North Somerset (V.C.6) and the old county of Bristol, most of which is incorporated in V.C.34 (East Gloucester). This is largely a personal study, derived chiefly from my own records collected since I took up residence in the Bristol district in May, 1960. However, in 1963 the late Mr. J. Cowley gave me a large number of records of Orthoptera made by himself and others, including many species of Saltatoria, from a wide range of English localities, including the area reviewed in this paper. In addition, I am most grateful to Dr. D. R. Ragge and Mr. Richard Savage who have also supplied records or other information.

Saltatoria are warmth-loving insects; therefore because of its southern position allied to a wide variety of habitats, from fenland to high downland and moorland, this region is home to a respectable proportion of the British species – 19 out of 29. It is quite possible that a few more species may yet be added to the list. Only as recently as 1977 the Grey Bush-cricket *Platycleis denticulata* (Panz.) was discovered by Mr. R. S. Cropper in some abundance on Brean Down, the first record for the old county of Somerset. Even the largest species are easily overlooked. This was true of the large and bulky Wart-biter *Decticus verrucivorus* (L.) which was not seen anywhere in Britain for almost 30 years until it was rediscovered simultaneously in Dorset and Sussex in 1955. Since then, due to an increased interest in Saltatoria amongst British entomologists, new sites in Kent, Sussex and North Wiltshire have been found. So its presence in the latter county suggests that it may well be worth searching the southern slopes of the Polden, Mendip and Cotswold Hills on hot, sunny days in August and early September when the loud, characteristic song of the male is likely to be heard.

In 1966 the Mole-cricket *Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa* (L.) was also rediscovered in Wiltshire and seems likely to be surviving in this locality, one of its few remaining sites in Britain, although Dr. David Ragge and I have failed to find it there on three visits this year (1980). However, this once widespread insect, now apparently almost extinct in Britain, may yet exist undetected in the extensive wet fenlands and water meadows of Somerset and Avon.

As suggested by Haes (1979), it may well be worth looking for Roesel's Bush-cricket *Metrioptera roeselii* (Hagen.) in the estuaries and coastal marshes of this part of England, since this east coast species has recently and surprisingly been discovered beside the Dovey Estuary in west Wales. I am very familiar with this insect as it is common on the Thames-side marshes near my former home and am therefore confident that I have not overlooked it in the

*11, Rockside Drive, Henleaze, Bristol, BS9 4NW.

possible west country localities which I have visited frequently.

Finally, there is a strong possibility that Cepero's Ground-hopper *Tetrix ceperoi* (Boliv.) may yet be found along the south side of the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary as it has been seen in the past on the Welsh side and there is plenty of marshy ground near water along the costs of the area covered by this paper.

Of the species present only two seem in danger of extinction: the Large Marsh Grasshopper *Stethophyma grossum* (L.) and the Woodland Grasshopper *Omocestus rufipes* (Zett.). The former is suffering from the effects of the extremely rapid and large-scale extraction of peat from the Somerset bogs since the Second World War which has destroyed or rendered much of its specialised habitat unsuitable, and is in need of a thorough and up-to-date survey of its present status; the latter appears to be endangered because so far it is known to me from only one Somerset wood, fortunately a nature reserve of the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation, but may well be discovered in other parts of the extensive woodlands surrounding its present site.

The Bog Bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* (L.) is very localised, but its existence in a well-maintained Somerset nature reserve should ensure the survival of healthy colonies.

BUSH-CRICKETS (Family Tettigoniidae)

Oak Bush-cricket *Meconema thalassinum* (Degeer)

This delicate-looking, pale green bush-cricket is not, as its English name suggests, confined to oak trees; in fact it is found on a wide range of broad-leaved trees, though mature oaks are the most favoured. As in the rest of southern England, it seems to be common in most, if not all, wooded areas of Bristol and North Somerset. Being fully winged and therefore capable of short flights, it most often comes under notice when attracted indoors after dark by artificial light. Adult males caught in this way have been brought to me by persons living in Stoke Bishop, Bristol (1964) and Pill, North Somerset (1964 and 1966).

If it were not for its strictly nocturnal habits, the Oak Bush-cricket would be recorded more often. When searching especially for it, I have found it with ease by day on oaks in Ashton Park (1977) and Leigh Woods (1978 and 1980) on the outskirts of Bristol, and in Alexandra Park in the middle of Clevedon (1967). There is an early record of its occurrence at Batheaston (Blathwayt, 1906) while, J. Cowley (1949) recorded it at Edington on the northern slopes of the Polden Hills in September, 1947 and mentions in his ms list of records a record of one in August 1953 taken at Charlton Mackrell by W. D. Colthurst. In the C. Bartlett collection in the Bristol City Museum there is a male which was collected at Portishead, presumably in the early 1900s.

Great Green Bush-cricket *Tettigonia viridissima* L.

This large and magnificent bright green species is locally common in North Somerset where its loud, penetrating and continuous

stridulation is a familiar sound in late summer and early autumn from early evening until late into the night. On hot days they often begin to 'sing' around mid-day. So loud is the stridulation of this species that I have found it easy to hear them stridulating from the roadside hedgerows and verges while driving in spite of the noise of the car engine. On such drives in September 1963 and July 1975, for instance, across the Mendips from Cheddar to Winscombe I heard males stridulating every hundred yards or so, and also on drives along the coast road from Clevedon to Portishead every year between 1964 and the present.

The calcareous hill ranges of North Somerset are the chief strongholds of *viridissima*, but it is also locally common on the Central Somerset Levels and Peat Moors in luxuriant patches of coarse vegetation and brambles in such places as Ashcott, Catcott, Edington, Shapwick and Walton Heath. However, it seems to be curiously scarce or absent on the levels to the north, such as Allerton, Cheddar and Kenn Moors, although numerous on the adjacent hills. Nevertheless, I have heard solitary males stridulating from hedgerows on the coast by Clevedon Pill, while further south it was recorded in 1953 and 1954 by the late J. Cowley in the sand dunes at Berrow, and doubtless still occurs there.

The following list of known localities and years recorded are extracted from my journal, unless otherwise stated in parentheses: Portishead: 2 females in C. Bartlett collection, Bristol City Museum, no date; Burnham-on-Sea (Blathwayt, 1906); Walton and Weston Downs, Portishead, 1964 - 70. Clevedon: 1967 - 1976 (East Clevedon, Clevedon Pill, Church Hill, Court Hill). Tickenham: 1964 - 1975. Cadbury Camp and Westpark Wood, nr. Tickenham: 1964. Weston-super-Mare: ca. 1900 (H. J. Charbonnier *per* J. Cowley). Berrow sand dunes 1953 and 1954 (J. Cowley). Mendip Hills 1960 - 1975 (Bleadon Hill, Crook Peak, Winscombe, Churchill, Shipham, Cheddar Wood, Cheddar, Westbury-sub-Mendip and Ebbor). Central Somerset Peat Moors: Walton Heath, 1948 (E. G. Neal); Edington Heath, 1950 (J. Cowley); Catcott Heath, 1950 (J. Cowley, D. G. Brown and J. H. P. Sankey), 1951 (A. H. Turner); Shapwick Heath, 1963; Buscott, 1963; Ashcott Heath, 1963 - 1967. Polden Hills: Moorlinch, 1953 (J. Cowley); Edington, 1955 (J. Westcott det. J. Cowley); Loxley Wood, Shapwick, 1951 (J. Cowley); Walton, 1949 (J. Cowley); Walton Hill 1971; Street, 1953 (F. R. Underwood det. J. Cowley).

Dark Bush-cricket *Pholidoptera griseoptera* (Degeer)

The choruses of chirps from large colonies of this rather spidery, dark-brown, wingless bush-cricket are the most prevalent of all nocturnal insect sounds in this region during the late summer and autumn. The males also often stridulate during the day, especially from mid-afternoon, but are rarely mature enough to do so before the beginning of August; thereafter a few may still be heard as late as the first week in November.

A bush-cricket of the nettle-beds, wayside scrub and woodland borders and rides, *griseoptera* is to be found in abundance in almost all suitable places throughout this region. It is one of the only two species of bush-crickets known on the island of Steep Holm in the Bristol Channel, where it was described as "common and widespread, often entering the barracks in autumn" (Parsons, 1978). Incidentally, this author stated that he was unable to find any previous record of this species for the island; in fact, the late J. Cowley (*pers. comm.*) collected a nymph there on the 10th June, 1956 and another on 14th May, 1961.

My list of localities is very extensive: Bristol: Clifton and Durdham Downs, 1960 - 79; Henleaze, 1977 - 78; King's Weston Down, 1970; Whiteshill and Hambrook, 1978; Shirehampton, 1963; Ashton Park, 1963; Leigh Woods, 1962 - 79. North Somerset: Pill, 1960 - 67; Lodway, 1966; Portishead 1960 - 76; Portishead-Clevedon coast road, 1964 - 70; Weston Down, Portishead, 1970; Clevedon 1967 - 76; Walton Common, Walton-in-Gordano, 1976; Clevedon-Failand road, 1967; Tickenham Hill, 1964; Westpark Wood and Cadbury Camp, near Tickenham, 1964; Wraxall (Battleaxes Hotel), 1967; Barrow Gurney Reservoir, 1962; Brockley Combe, 1973; Goblin Combe, 1964; Mendips: Bleadon Hill, 1960; Crook Peak, 1960; Cheddar to Churchill via Shipham, 1963; Batheaston, near Bath (Blathwayt, 1906); Central Peat Moors: Ashcott Heath, 1963 - 67; Buscott, 1963 - 67; Shapwick Heath, 1963 - 79; Meare Heath, 1964 - 79; Polden Hills: Cock Hill, 1950 (J. Cowley); Edington 1948 - 50 (J. Cowley); Moorlinch, 1953 (J. Cowley); Loxley Wood, Shapwick, 1947 (J. Cowley, 1949); Priest Hill, near Ashcott, 1951 (W. D. Colthurst, det. J. Cowley); Walton Hill, 1948 (J. Cowley), still there 1971 - 74; Great Breach Wood, near Compton Dundon, 1971-74; Charlton Mackrell, 1953 (C. Avent, det. J. Cowley). Swell Wood, Fivehead, 1961; Muchelney, 1961; Langport, 1961; Steep Holm, 1956 and 1961 (J. Cowley) and 1975 - 76, (Parsons, 1978).

(To be continued)

Memoir of the Life and Works of Edward Newman by his Son (Thomas Prichard Newman) 1876. **A facsimile with a new Introduction** by E. W. Classey. Portrait, 5 wood engravings, [iii] + 32pp., stiff wrapper, 1980. Price £2.

For devotees of Edward Newman this facsimile of a curious and interesting old pamphlet marks a memorable event, since very few copies of the original appear to have survived. Much additional information to that found in the obituary notice (which appeared in the *Entomologist* for December 1876) is contained herein, and the identity of the author of the anonymous *Letters of Rusticus* (1849) is confirmed. A particularly interesting feature of the *Memoir* is the woodcut on page 10, which shows the Bull Inn, at Birch Wood, Kent (reproduced from a vignette in the *Entomological Magazine* of 1837), famous as a venue of 19th century entomologists, and